

February 16, 1968

Mr. William D. Carey
Assistant Director
Executive Office of the President
Bureau of the Budget
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Mr. Carey:

I was very pleased to have received your letter of February 5 concerning my column in the Post. In fact after I read the column in cold print I was wavering myself whether to write you to assure you that I had a deeper sympathy for your purposes than may have appeared in the column. I was reacting more to what did appear in print in Industrial Research and is likely to have as much influence with other policy makers and legislators than what I had guessed to be your own motives in pursuing this kind of analysis. Your letter certainly corroborated these expectations.

If you have written anything more authoritative than that news report tells about rational decision making in the allocation of resources I would be very eager to have a chance to read it. (And if it is not published, needless to say, this can be off the record)

If I have any residual anxiety it has to do with the over exuberant use of a priori principles in making "rational" judgments on social affairs. The processes on which we are attempting to reach rational judgments are inevitably far more complex than the models we build of them and I hardly have to tell you how real life is full of paradoxes. So I would suggest that an essential part of any new system is a built-in technique for self evaluation of its performance - essentially the same demand that we would want to make of any subsystem. At least one way that I can see of beginning to do this is to look at history, try to isolate examples that we retrospectively perceive as having been the wrong decisions and then show that any new procedure that we are trying to build would have been likely to deliver a more satisfactory result.

CAREY

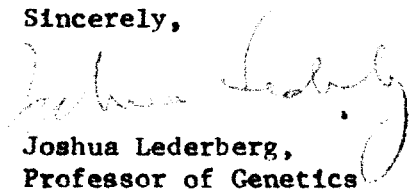
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The one point I regret having never gotten around to express clearly in my column about the virtues of a merit matrix is the extent to which it can help to focus controversies on the underlying assumptions at issue. I hope to focus a little more sharply on this in some future writing.

Our mutual friend, Bill Greulich has pressed me very warmly to make an effort to meet you and I really would like very much to do this at my next opportunity in Washington. I will be attending a meeting of the Advisory Council for the National Institute of Mental Health from March 25 to 27 and would like to ask you whether you would be free for some informal conversation the evening of the 27th. If that is inconvenient for you, there is a modest probability that our Council work will be over in time for lunch on the 27th but I am a little less sure about that. If this is pressing you for a commitment you cannot comfortably make please let me know and I will then leave it to what ever we can arrange by a telephone call while I am in Washington.

While I am in town I will be either staying with Judge David Bazelon at 244-4550 or else either he or Dr. Yolles's office at NIH will know where I am. Lest this confuse you, let me say that I mean to call you.

Sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg,
Professor of Genetics

JL/gem